

## A PHILATELIC VOYAGE WITH CHARLES DARWIN ON BOARD THE *HMS BEAGLE*, 1831–1836

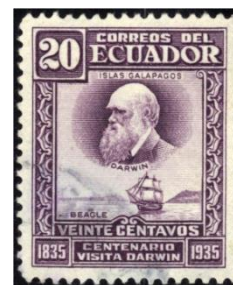
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[Ed. Note: This article is a reprint, with permission of the author, of the original published in Bio-Philately, Volume 19, Number 3. Because the journal was unable to reproduce and print stamp images at that time, the original article was text-only and merely made reference to each stamp. I have updated it to include the actual stamp images. In some cases I have substituted more a recent issue for the original cited item.]

On December 27, 1831, the *HMS Beagle* sailed from England on a nautical surveying voyage with an unknown naturalist by the name of Charles Darwin on board. This voyage was to rank with the travels of St. Paul and the voyages of Columbus and Magellan in terms of the impact it has had on how man perceives his universe.

The *Beagle* dropped anchor first in the Cape Verde Islands in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Africa where Darwin was able to observe the geological nature of volcanic islands. Darwin's observations of the flora and fauna of these islands were to serve as a very important basis for comparison when he visited the Galápagos Islands later in the voyage.



*HMS Beagle*  
Ecuador Sc#343  
A133, 1936



Cape Verde Location  
Cape Verde Sc#277  
A11, 1952



São Vicente Is.  
Cape Verde Sc#257  
A9, 1948



São Vicente Beach  
Cape Verde Sc#262  
A10, 1948



Fogo Island Volcano  
Cape Verde Sc#264  
A10, 1948

Darwin became ecstatic when the ship reached Brazil and described the flora and fauna as follows:

"I can only add raptures to the former raptures. I collected a great number of brilliantly colored flowers, enough to make a florist go wild. Brazilian scenery is nothing more nor less than a view in the Arabian Nights, with the advantage of reality."



Royal Palms  
Brazil Sc#449  
A144, 1937



Forest  
Brazil Sc#841  
A371, 1956



Harpy Eagle  
Brazil Sc#1084  
A577, 1968



Red-crested Cardinal  
Brazil Sc#1087  
A580, 1968



Uirapuru  
Brazil Sc#1088  
A580, 1968





Iguazu Falls  
Argentina Sc#639  
A240, 1955

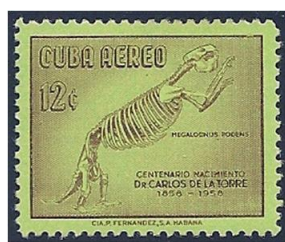
It was the great diversity of living plant and animal species that impressed Darwin during his stay in Brazil. When the *Beagle* sailed down the coast to Argentina, Darwin's interest shifted from the study of living species to the study of extinct species.

Darwin found the Argentine pampas to be a source of huge fossil bones of enormous prehistoric animals.\*

[\*It is not implied that these specific fossils are found in Argentina.]



Tierra del Fuego  
Argentina Sc#695  
A277, 1959



Megalocnus  
Cuba Sc#C183  
AP84, 1958



Iguanodon  
Belgium Sc#664  
A206, 1966



Deinotherium  
Romania Sc#1892  
A593, 1966

He began to wonder if, in the past, more animals had existed than Noah's Ark could have accommodated.

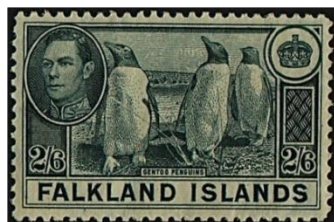


Noah's Ark Animals  
Israel Sc#1712  
A779, 2007



In the Falkland Islands and Argentina Darwin observed three species of birds that were flightless:

“Thus we find in South America three birds which use their wings for other purposes besides flight; the penguins as fins, the steamer (duck) as paddles, and the ostrich (rhea) as sails...”



Gentoo Penguin  
Falkland Islands Sc#93  
A22, 1938



Steamer Ducks  
Falkland Islands Sc#133  
A37, 1960



Greater Rhea  
Argentina Sc#CB18  
SP14, 1960



Magellan Strait  
Chile Sc#237  
A104, 1944

The *Beagle* sailed from Argentina to Chile via the Straits of Magellan. It was in Chile that Darwin came to appreciate the role of earthquakes and volcanic action as powerful geologic forces. He described the eruption of Mt. Osorno as follows:

“On the night of the 19th the volcano Osorno was in action. At midnight the sentry observed something like a large star, which gradually increased in size til about three o’clock, when it presented a very magnificent spectacle. By the aid of a glass, dark objects, in constant succession, were seen, in the midst of a great glare of red light, to be thrown up and to fall down. The light was sufficient to cast on the water a long bright reflection.”



Mount Osorno  
Chile Sc#206  
A84, 1938

Hardly a month had passed when a severe earthquake shook the ground under Darwin’s feet. Darwin recorded in his diary:

“The most remarkable effect of this earthquake was the permanent elevation of the land...Captain Fitz Roy found beds of putrid mussel shells still adhering to the rocks ten feet above high-water mark; the inhabitants had formerly dived at low-water spring-tides for these shells.”

They had observed that earthquakes could push the earth’s crust toward the skies ultimately forming mountains! Soon afterwards when climbing the Andes the *Beagle*’s Naturalist found fossil sea shells as high as 14,000 feet.



Nautilus Fossil  
Algeria Sc#247  
A39, 1952



Ammonite  
Cuba Sc#C184  
AP84, 1958



Intl. Geological Congress  
Czechoslovakia Sc#1562 & Sc#1559  
A587, 1968

This led him to record in his diary:

“I now beheld the bed of the ocean forming a chain of mountains more than seven thousand feet in height.”



Ammonite  
Switzerland Sc#B274  
SP208, 1958



Gryphaea Fossil  
Switzerland Sc#B294  
SP208, 1960



Ammonite  
Netherlands Sc#B364  
SP172, 1962



Mount Fitz Roy  
Argentina Sc#641  
A240, 1955



Andes Mountains  
Chile Sc#329  
A159, 1962

Darwin became convinced that “nothing, not even the wind that blows, is so unstable as the level of the crust of this earth.”



Galápagos Islands Map  
Ecuador Sc#340  
A130, 1936



Galápagos Islands  
Ecuador Sc#L2  
A2, 1957

Darwin was now thinking in terms of change rather than constancy in the geological realm. He was to extend this way of thinking to the biological realm as the *Beagle* dropped anchor in the Galápagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador on September 15, 1835.

The geology and natural history of these islands played a major role in undermining Darwin's belief in the doctrine of special creation.



Galápagos Scene  
Ecuador Sc#345  
A135, 1936



Land Iguana  
Ecuador Sc#341  
A131, 1936



Marine Iguana  
Ecuador Sc#L3  
A1, 1957



Tortoise  
Ecuador Sc#342  
A132, 1936



In the *Origin of Species*, Darwin states:

“The Galápagos Archipelago, situated under the equator, lies at the distance of between 500 and 600 miles from the shores of South America....The Naturalist looking at the inhabitants of these volcanic islands in the Pacific, distant several hundred miles from the continent feels he is standing on American land. Why should this be so? Why should the species which are supposed to have been created in the Galápagos Archipelago, and nowhere else, bear so plainly the stamp of affinity to those created in America? There is nothing in the conditions of life, in the geological nature of the islands, in their height or climate, or in the proportions in which the several classes are associated together, which closely resembles the conditions of the South American Coast; in fact, there is a considerable dissimilarity in all these respects. On the other hand, there is a considerable degree of resemblance in the volcanic nature of the soil, in the climate, height, and size of the islands, between the Galápagos and the Cape Verde Archipelagoes; but what an entire and absolute difference in their inhabitants! The inhabitants of the Cape Verde Islands are related to those of Africa, like those of Galápagos to America. Facts such as these admit to no sort of explanation on the ordinary view of independent creation.”

Tahiti was the next island visited by the *Beagle* on its epoch making voyage around the world. Darwin described his first glimpse of Tahiti as follows:



Outrigger Canoe  
French Polynesia Sc#217  
A35, 1966

“At daylight, Tahiti, an island which must forever remain classical to the voyager in the South Sea, was in view....As we anchored in Matavia Bay we were surrounded by canoes.”



South Pacific Map  
French Polynesia Sc#198  
A29, 1962

The inhabitants of Tahiti also made a lasting impression on young Darwin who wrote:

“I was pleased with nothing so much as with the inhabitants. The common people when working, keep the upper part of their bodies quite naked, and it is then that the Tahitians are seen to advantage. They are very tall, broad-shouldered, athletic, and well-proportioned. A white man bathing by the side of a Tahitian was like a plant bleached by the gardener’s art compared with a fine dark green one growing vigorously in the fields.

“Most of the men are tattooed, and the ornaments follow the curvature of the body so gracefully that they have a very elegant effect.”



Tahitian Dancers  
Fr. Polynesia Sc#194  
A26, 1960



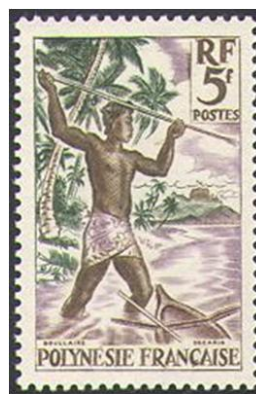
Tahitian Girl  
Fr. Polynesia Sc#171  
A20, 1948



Bora Bora Girl  
Fr. Polynesia Sc#180  
A23, 1955



Polynesian Girl  
Fr. Polynesia Sc#182  
A24, 1958



Spear Fishing  
Fr. Polynesia Sc#193  
A25, 1960



Tattooed Man  
Fr. Polynesia Sc#239  
A39, 1968

The *Beagle* sailed on, stopping briefly at New Zealand, and dropped anchor in Sydney Harbor in Australia on January 12, 1836. While in Australia, Darwin saw the platypus, Australian aborigines, and a kangaroo rat, but he was not fortunate enough to have seen a wild kangaroo.



Platypus  
Australia Sc#324  
A111, 1959



Aborigine  
Australia Sc#226  
A59, 1950



Aborigine  
Australia Sc#248  
A59, 1952



Kangaroo  
Australia Sc#322  
A111, 1959

Sailing west from Australia, the *Beagle* reached the Cocos (Keeling) Islands on April 2, 1836. It was here that Darwin gathered the data that led him to hypothesize that atoll islands were formed by the accumulation of the remains of corals growing on the rim of volcanoes that were sinking into the ocean.

"I am glad to have visited these islands: such formations surely rank high amongst the wonderful objects of this world. Captain Fitz Roy found no bottom with a line 7,200 feet in length, at a distance of only 2,200 yards from the shore; hence this island forms a lofty submarine mountain, with sides steeper even than those of the most abrupt volcanic cone. The saucer shaped summit is nearly ten miles across.... We feel surprised when travelers tell us of the vast dimensions of the pyramids and other great ruins, but how utterly insignificant are the greatest of these when compared to these mountains of stone accumulated by the agency of various minute and tender animals (corals)."

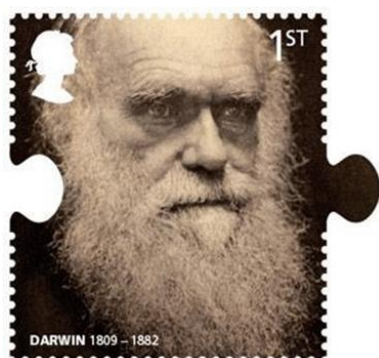


Coral  
Cocos Islands Sc#12  
A5, 1969



Volcanic Rim  
Cocos Islands Sc#3  
A3, 1963

The ship continued its homeward bound journey rounding the Cape of Good Hope of Africa and after a few stopovers dropped anchor in Falmouth, England on October 2, 1836. Thus ended one of the most important voyages of all time.



Charles Darwin  
Great Britain Sc#2627  
A663, 2009

While on this voyage, Darwin saw a volcano in eruption, and experienced an earthquake and studied the associated elevation of the land. He observed the diversity of plants and animals (both living and fossil) and the restricted geographical range of many species. These observations led Darwin to accept geological and biological evolution as a fact and ultimately to propose the theory of natural selection to explain how biological evolution takes place.



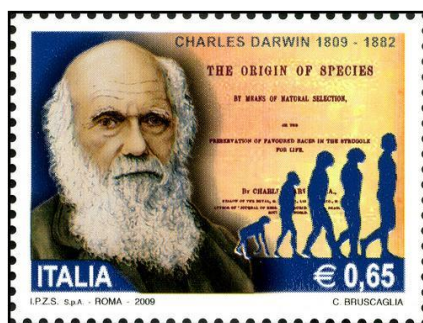
Darwin's Theory  
Great Britain Sc#1868  
A500, 1999



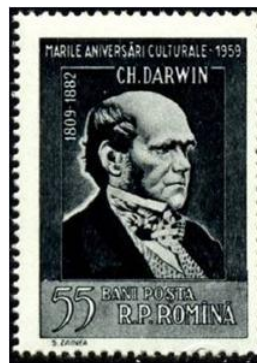
*The Origin of Species* in which Darwin expounded the fact of evolution and the theory of natural selection was published in 1859.



Charles Darwin  
DDR Sc#388  
A121, 1958



*The Origin of Species*  
Italy Sc#2911  
A1616, 2009



Darwin  
Romania Sc#1266  
A467, 1959



Darwin  
Russia Sc#2166  
A1133, 1959



Darwin wrote several other books including *The Descent of Man* and *Selection in Relation to Sex* in 1871. He died in 1882 and his remains were interred in Westminster Abbey.



Westminster Abbey  
Great Britain Sc#453  
A187, 1966

